The Best Midrange DSLR

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If you’re looking to buy a midrange DSLR that gives you outstanding image quality, fast and precise autofocus, the security of a rugged weather-sealed body, and great battery life, the [Nikon D7200](https://wclink.co/link/3265/0/1/25274/) is the camera you should get.

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Ricoh announced the [Pentax KP](https://wclink.co/link/17697/0/1/30730/), a weather-sealed DSLR with a tilting touchscreen and a top sensitivity of ISO 819,200. You can read more about it in our [What to look forward to](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-mid-range-dslr/#what-to-look-forward-to) section.

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[](https://wclink.co/link/3265/91797/1/25296)

[Our pick](https://wclink.co/link/3265/91797/1/25296)

[Nikon D7200](https://wclink.co/link/3265/91797/1/25296)

Nikon’s flagship APS-C DSLR provides the best image quality you can find, has dual SD card slots, and offers outstanding battery life.

[$1,297\* from B&H](https://wclink.co/link/3265/91797/1/25296)

[$1,297 from Amazon](https://wclink.co/link/3265/9018/1/25296)

\*At the time of publishing, the price was $1,347.

The [D7200](https://wclink.co/link/3265/0/1/25274/) is considerably more expensive than a [beginner DSLR](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/best-budget-dslr-camera/)—but the extra expense will buy you a 24-megapixel [APS-C](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/APS-C) camera that takes clean, detailed photos at high ISOs, as well as a professional-grade autofocus system that works in near darkness. You also get dual SD card slots, so you’ll never have to worry about running out of storage space. After dozens of research hours poring over reviews and test results for 12 different cameras, and real-world shooting with the top contenders, we’ve determined that the Nikon D7200 is the one we would buy.

In the $1,000-plus midrange category, there are no bad DSLR cameras. Crisp, detailed images and easy access to exposure and shooting controls are a given. What sets the D7200 apart is class-leading output at high ISO settings, along with a well-implemented autofocus system that returns many more hits than misses, and battery life that lets you shoot for days on a single charge.

The [Nikon D7200](https://wclink.co/link/3265/0/1/25274/) replaces our previous pick, the [Nikon D7100](https://wclink.co/link/3887/0/1/25277/). This earlier model remains available and has similar specs. The sensor, battery life, and autofocus system are improved in the new model, however, so if you’re trying to decide between the two, we think the D7200 is a much better long-term value.

Also great

[](https://wclink.co/link/6488/91778/1/25297)

[$1,500\* from B&H](https://wclink.co/link/6488/91778/1/25297)

[$1,500 from Amazon](https://wclink.co/link/6488/18920/1/25297)

\*At the time of publishing, the price was $1,600.

[For video shooters and Canon users](https://wclink.co/link/6488/91778/1/25297)

[Canon EOS 80D](https://wclink.co/link/6488/91778/1/25297)

This Canon DSLR can’t quite match the image quality of our top pick, but it offers an articulated rear screen and faster, more-precise autofocus in live view mode, making it great for video shooters.

If you shoot a fair amount of video or have a few Canon lenses and don’t want to switch brands, we really like the [Canon EOS 80D](https://wclink.co/link/6488/0/1/25291/) as a runner-up option. [DxOMark measured its dynamic range](http://www.dxomark.com/Cameras/Compare/Side-by-side/Canon-EOS-80D-versus-Nikon-D7200___1076_1020) as a bit below that of our top pick, so it can’t display as wide a range of highlights and shadows in a single image. But the 80D does have an articulated touchscreen as well as Canon’s well-regarded Dual Pixel autofocus system, which produces faster, more accurate focus when you’re shooting stills and video in live view mode.

Also great

[](https://wclink.co/link/4642/91779/1/25298)

[$1,600\* from B&H](https://wclink.co/link/4642/91779/1/25298)

[$1,600 from Amazon](https://wclink.co/link/4642/44081/1/25298)

\*At the time of publishing, the price was $1,800.

[For sports and action](https://wclink.co/link/4642/91779/1/25298)

[Sony a77 II](https://wclink.co/link/4642/91779/1/25298)

Its battery life is poor, and you might balk at using an electronic viewfinder, but the a77 II lets you shoot at a blazing 12 fps and customize a wide range of video-shooting options.

If you shoot action and sports on a regular basis, you may be willing to live with poor battery life in order to get the blazing-fast 12 frames per second that the [Sony a77 II](https://wclink.co/link/4642/0/1/25279/) delivers. This model also gives you an impressive array of video options. The fact that it has an electronic viewfinder instead of an optical one will be a dealbreaker for some people, though, and that’s part of the reason it falls below our top pick and runner-up.

Table of contents

* [Why you should trust me](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-mid-range-dslr/#why-you-should-trust-me)
* [Who should buy this](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-mid-range-dslr/#who-should-buy-this)
* [Should you upgrade?](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-mid-range-dslr/#should-you-upgrade)
* [How we picked](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-mid-range-dslr/#how-we-picked)
* [Our pick](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-mid-range-dslr/#our-pick)
* [Who else likes our pick](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-mid-range-dslr/#who-else-likes-our-pick)
* [Flaws but not dealbreakers](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-mid-range-dslr/#flaws-but-not-dealbreakers)
* [Runner-up](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-mid-range-dslr/#runnerup)
* [Also great (for sports and action)](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-mid-range-dslr/#also-great-for-sports-and-action)
* [The competition](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-mid-range-dslr/#the-competition)
* [What to look forward to](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-mid-range-dslr/#what-to-look-forward-to)

Why you should trust me

I’ve worked as a professional photographer and digital-imaging consultant for close to 15 years. I’m on the faculty of New York City’s International Center of Photography, and I lead photography workshops around the country. I’ve been covering cameras and photo gear here at The Wirecutter since 2013, getting to shoot with dozens of new cameras and lenses as they become available. I also shoot some of the lifestyle photography you see on our sister site, [The Sweethome](http://thesweethome.com/). As a result, I have a keen understanding of current camera technology as well as the features and performance that make a real difference when you’re out shooting.

Who should buy this

Not too long ago, the reasons for buying a DSLR were simple: A DSLR gave you great-looking, high-resolution photos and offered plenty of external controls for quickly adjusting exposure and shooting settings. Those traits still apply, but today’s [best mirrorless cameras](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/best-mirrorless-camera/) provide similar benefits in a much smaller and lighter package.



The large, bright viewfinders found on DSLRs allow you to get precise framing for your shot, even on sunny days where glare can make viewing a rear screen difficult.

DSLRs still have their advantages, though. With their lower energy use (most have optical viewfinders rather than electronic viewfinders, so they don’t have to power a bright LCD screen) and their room for physically larger batteries, you can snap many more photos on a single charge. And because DSLRs (and their analog SLR cousins) have been around for so long, you can’t beat their lens selection. From super-telephoto lenses to ultra-wide-angle lenses to specialty items such as [tilt-shift lenses](http://www.digitalcameraworld.com/2013/10/30/tilt-shift-photography-how-to-use-1-lens-for-6-different-effects/), buying into a DSLR system gives you an incredible number of lens choices. Canon and Nikon owners, for example, can each choose from more than 150 past and present lenses that are compatible with current and future DSLRs. And for sports and action photography, where focusing speed is crucial, the sophisticated autofocus systems of DSLRs generally deliver more keepers than most mirrorless cameras.

Should you upgrade?

Battery life can be rather poor on many entry-level DSLRs, with 450 to 500 shots on a single charge being common.

If you own a $500 DSLR, such as the [Nikon D3300](https://wclink.co/link/394/0/1/25278/) or any of the models in our [beginner DSLR guide](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/best-budget-dslr-camera/), you’re already getting enough resolution for most needs, along with good image quality. Such models also make the most sense if you’re looking to upgrade to a DSLR from a point-and-shoot camera. Stepping up to a midrange model like the [Nikon D7200](https://wclink.co/link/3265/0/1/25274/) or [Canon EOS 80D](https://wclink.co/link/6488/0/1/25291/), however, can bring some important advantages. Midrange DSLRs have more-sophisticated autofocus algorithms and typically have a greater number of focus points for the camera to choose from, both of which help you better lock focus on fast-moving or small subjects.

Entry-level models such as the [Canon EOS Rebel T6i](https://wclink.co/link/4643/0/1/25280/) and [T6s](https://wclink.co/link/3854/0/1/25292/) also tend to have much more plastic in their body construction, which can make them more susceptible to damage if you’re not one to baby your equipment. And with the exception of Pentax models like the [K-S2](https://wclink.co/link/3853/0/1/25275/) and [K-5 IIs](https://wclink.co/link/4644/0/1/25281/), weather-sealing is a feature you usually find only by upgrading to a midrange DSLR.

Battery life can be rather poor on many entry-level DSLRs, with 450 to 500 shots on a single charge being common. In contrast, our top midrange DSLR is rated at 1,100 shots, enough for you to shoot for a few days without having to charge the battery.



For compact-camera owners, one of the most noticeable benefits of moving up to the larger APS-C sensors found on DSLRs is the ability to blur backgrounds, nicely drawing attention to the main subject.

If you already own a midrange DSLR, know that they age pretty well—the improvements in a newer model tend to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. If your camera is less than three years old, you have no need to replace it, and especially for owners of our previous top pick, the [Nikon D7100](https://wclink.co/link/3887/0/1/25277/), upgrading to our new pick doesn’t make much sense. But if you have the now-five-year-old D7000, our top pick offers a big jump in resolution, much cleaner images in low light, a more sophisticated AF system, and better video specs.

Though there’s no hard-and-fast rule, we suggest waiting about four years, or at the very least skipping a generation, before upgrading to a newer-model [APS-C](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/APS-C) DSLR. That’s about how long it takes for camera makers to offer significant, rather than incremental, improvements.

How we picked



After narrowing down our choices to the Nikon D7200 and Canon EOS 80D, I took both cameras out for some real-world shooting.

Midrange DSLRs sit between beginner-friendly DSLRs and [full-frame models](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Full-frame_digital_SLR) that cater to working pros and longtime hobbyists. Midrange models are rugged enough for shooting in the elements; they also have large, bright viewfinders and offer fast shooting speeds. And like entry-level DSLRs, they use APS-C sensors that are significantly smaller than those on full-frame models, which means you get a less bulky camera that’s also less expensive.

With those criteria in mind, I spent hours poring over manufacturer spec sheets and reading reviews from authoritative sources. The pool of midrange DSLRs is actually relatively small: By restricting our research to APS-C sensor cameras with primarily metal (versus plastic) bodies and reasonably current AF systems, we ended up with 11 models from Canon, Nikon, Pentax, and Sony.

Even though these cameras have a long shelf life, we were able to eliminate old models such as the [Canon EOS 60D](https://wclink.co/link/587/0/1/25289/) and [EOS 7D](https://wclink.co/link/4652/0/1/25288/). With outdated, 2009 sensor technology, these cameras have a limited ISO range and produce more noise when shooting in low light than current models. The more recently released [Canon EOS Rebel T6s](https://wclink.co/link/3854/0/1/25292/), while adding some advanced features to appeal to experienced DSLR users, still has a cramped viewfinder, poor burst rates, and abysmal battery life. When the [Canon EOS 80D](https://wclink.co/link/6488/0/1/25291/) replaced the [EOS 70D](https://wclink.co/link/588/0/1/25293/), we tested it as well. (You can read more details about what we cut in the [Competition](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-mid-range-dslr/#the-competition) section below.)

Our pick



The best image quality and great battery life, in a weather-resistant body.

[](https://wclink.co/link/3265/91797/1/25296)

[$1,297\* from B&H](https://wclink.co/link/3265/91797/1/25296)

[$1,297 from Amazon](https://wclink.co/link/3265/9018/1/25296)

\*At the time of publishing, the price was $1,347.

[Our pick](https://wclink.co/link/3265/91797/1/25296)

[Nikon D7200](https://wclink.co/link/3265/91797/1/25296)

Nikon’s flagship APS-C DSLR provides the best image quality you can find, has dual SD card slots, and offers outstanding battery life.

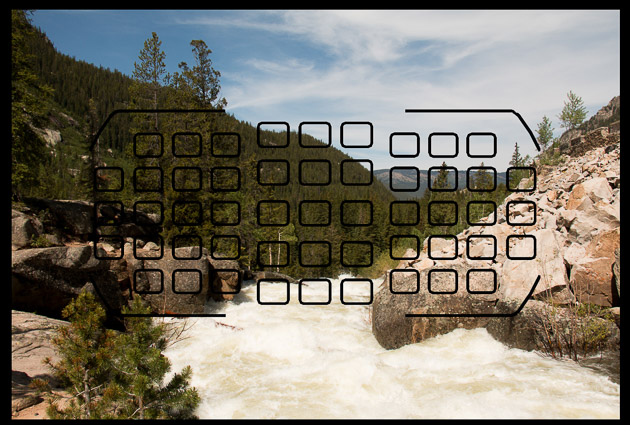
After poring over spec sheets and reading more than 90 expert reviews for nearly a dozen cameras, and then spending several days shooting with the top contenders, we think the [Nikon D7200](https://wclink.co/link/3265/0/1/25274/) is the best midrange DSLR you can buy.

First and foremost, the D7200 delivers outstanding image quality. While offering the same 24-megapixel resolution as its predecessor (the [D7100](https://wclink.co/link/3887/0/1/25277/), our previous top pick in this category), this model has both a newer sensor and an updated image processor. The result is improved dynamic range (the ability to record detail in both light and dark areas of a scene), as well as cleaner images at high-ISO settings. These differences aren’t night and day, but they are enough to give the D7200 the best image-quality performance of anything in its class. And thanks to its rugged, magnesium-alloy body with water-and-dust-resistant sealing, you can take the camera on any type of adventure to get those great images. During a trip to Colorado, for instance, I shot with the D7200 for nearly an hour in a steady rain, and the camera performed flawlessly.



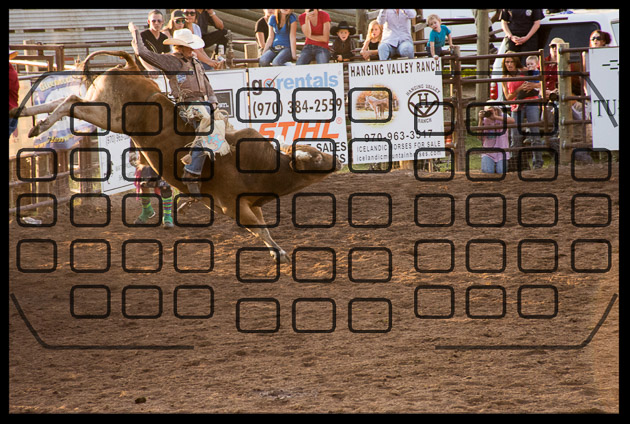
The Nikon D7200 delivers great-looking photos right out of the box. I shot this image using the camera’s landscape picture style with no additional edits.

The camera’s autofocus system essentially matches that of the full-frame (and much more expensive) [Nikon D750](https://wclink.co/link/4645/0/1/25282/), with 51 AF points that cover a majority of the image frame. Having a large number of densely packed AF points helps the camera more accurately lock and track focus on fast-moving subjects, ensuring that you get more keepers than rejects.



The Nikon D7200 has 51 autofocus points that cover a sizable area of the frame.

For even more comprehensive AF tracking, you can set the D7200 to a 1.3x crop mode. Although this setting reduces your field of view significantly, the benefit is that those 51 AF points cover virtually the entire frame. In this mode, the camera can automatically track focus on your subject no matter where it is in the frame, great for fast-moving sports and action photography.



Set the D7200 to its 1.3x crop mode, and the 51 AF points cover nearly the entire image area, letting you track subjects no matter where they are in the frame.

Regardless of the mode you’re in, those AF points are sensitive down to -3 EV (a standard measurement of light levels, around [0.3 lx](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exposure_value#EV_as_a_measure_of_luminance_and_illuminance) or roughly [full-moon illumination](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lux#Illuminance)). This means that the camera can lock focus in especially dim scenes, as you can see in the photo below. Our runner-up pick, the Canon EOS 80D, matches the D7200 in low-light focus performance. Our top pick, however, still produces images that have a bit less noise, as you can see in [DPReview’s side-by-side comparison tool](http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/image-comparison?attr18=lowlight&attr13_0=canon_eos80d&attr13_1=nikon_d7200&attr13_2=pentax_k3ii&attr13_3=canon_eos5dmkii&attr15_0=jpeg&attr15_1=jpeg&attr15_2=jpeg&attr15_3=jpeg&attr16_0=12800&attr16_1=12800&attr16_2=12800&attr16_3=12800&attr126_2=normal&normalization=full&widget=1&x=0.2952017885806007&y=-0.7083395745955662).



The D7200’s autofocus system excels in low-light photography. In this nighttime scene, the camera instantly locked focus on the distant tree leaves in the center of the frame even though they were only barely visible through the viewfinder.

As you might expect on a midrange DSLR, the D7200 provides a wealth of physical buttons, dials, and switches to control shooting and exposure settings. With dedicated buttons for exposure compensation, metering mode, white balance, bracketing, focus and exposure lock, and movie recording, you’ll rarely need to dive into the camera’s on-screen menus to adjust a setting. Front and rear control dials let you easily adjust aperture and shutter speed. A mode drive switch that rests beneath the shooting-mode dial lets you choose single-frame shooting, continuous shooting, or a self-timer, as well as a mirror lockup and [quiet-shutter mode](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fz9JHIX7Big).

If all of that sounds a bit overwhelming, remember that a DSLR at this price is meant for people who will benefit by configuring the camera to work best for their particular style of shooting and to make exposure changes on the fly. If you want to use your camera only in fully automated point-and-shoot mode, buying the D7200 is like using a sports car to go grocery shopping. If your needs are not quite as extensive, take a look at our [entry-level DSLR guide](http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/best-budget-dslr-camera/).



The 18-140mm kit lens that comes with the D7200 makes for an effective portrait lens at its telephoto end. I shot this image using the camera’s portrait picture style with no additional edits.

The optical viewfinder on the D7200 is a nice, bright [pentaprism](http://photography.incyder.info/pentaprism-vs-pentamirror-which-is-better/) unit that offers a higher scene magnification than the one on our runner-up. In addition to being able to see the scene clearly, with the D7200’s 100 percent frame coverage you see exactly what the sensor will capture.

The D7200 inherits Nikon’s well-thought-out Auto ISO settings, which you can adjust to be lens specific. This is important because your choice of ISO greatly influences the shutter speed your camera will choose. All else being equal, a higher ISO lets you use a faster shutter speed. You want to use a shutter speed fast enough to avoid camera shake, but that threshold varies based on the focal length of the lens you’re using—zoom lenses require faster shutter speeds than wide-angle lenses, for example. With the D7200, you can let the camera automatically choose an ISO that takes into account the actual focal length your zoom lens is set to. Use the [18-140mm kit lens](https://wclink.co/link/4646/0/1/25283/) at either the wide end or the zoom end, and the camera will choose an appropriate ISO setting.

Why not just manually set a high ISO and be done with it? At higher ISOs you get more noise (colored specs that show up in dark areas of the image), so you want to keep the ISO as low you can without introducing camera shake or inadvertent subject blur. Thanks to Nikon’s “intelligent” Auto ISO feature, the D7200 will pick the lowest noise option it can get away with for any given lens.



The Nikon D7200 performs well in scenes with high contrast. Shooting in the dark interior of this abandoned shack, I was able to get detail in both the shadow areas and the bright outdoor scene.

With dual SD card slots, the D7200 gives you a few options for storing images. You can install two cards and set one for overflow, meaning that the camera will automatically save to the overflow card when the primary card runs out of space. Alternatively, you can write simultaneously to both cards for an automatic backup, or shoot in Raw+JPEG mode, saving each format to its own card.

Battery life is nothing short of amazing, as the D7200 is rated for 1,100 shots on a single charge—most DSLRs in this class are good for only about 600 to 700 shots per charge. Of course, real-world battery performance will vary depending on your use of flash, live view mode, video, or Wi-Fi, but in two weeks of moderate shooting I was able to go three to four days without recharging the battery; such longevity is especially useful during travel.

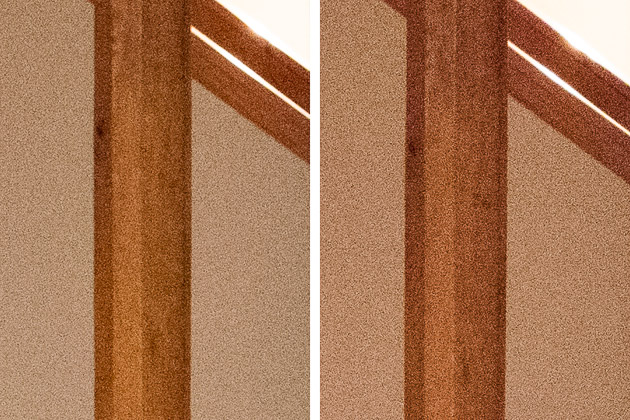
The Nikon D7200 delivers what [DPReview confidently calls](http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/nikon-d7200/14) “class-leading low-light performance.” At high ISO settings you get cleaner, more-detailed images than with any other APS-C DSLR. For the comparison below, I shot the same indoor nighttime scene with both the D7200 and the Canon EOS 80D, putting each camera at ISO 12,800 and its default noise-reduction settings. The D7200 image has less color noise and shows fine image detail more clearly. Admittedly, you have to be pixel peeping to see these differences (for Web use, both images will look just fine), but if you want the most detail and the least amount of noise from your APS-C DSLR, the D7200 is king of the hill.



For the comparisons below, I shot this nighttime indoor scene, lit by a single reading lamp, with both the Nikon D7200 and the Canon EOS 80D at identical exposures using ISO 12,800 and auto white balance.



In these 100 percent crops from the Nikon D7200 (left) and Canon EOS 80D (right) JPEGs, the D7200 photo shows cleaner, more crisp detail while the 80D photo suffers from more visible smearing of fine details.



Here are 100 percent crops from the D7200 (left) and 80D (right) raw files. In Adobe Lightroom software at its default settings, the D7200 photo exhibits a noticeably more neutral, accurate white balance.

The D7200 comes bundled with Nikon’s [18-140mm f/3.5-5.6G ED VR Nikkor](https://wclink.co/link/4646/0/1/25283/) lens. Although you wouldn’t expect jaw-dropping performance from a kit lens, this travel-friendly APS-C zoom lens has a particularly useful 27-210mm focal length equivalent and built-in image stabilization, and it delivers surprisingly good sharpness across the entire frame. [DxOMark calls it](http://www.dxomark.com/Reviews/Nikon-Nikkor-18-140mm-f3.5-5.6-ED-VR-lens-review-Accessible-portable-and-high-performance/Nikkor-18-140mm-f3.5-5.6-ED-VR-lens-performance) “the sharpest ‘super-zoom’ for Nikon DX format cameras in our database, and one of the best optical performers of its type.”

Camera makers have been including built-in Wi-Fi in their midrange DSLRs for a while now, so the nuts and bolts of setup and operation are pretty well established. Using an iOS or Android device, you can wirelessly transfer photos from the camera to the phone or tablet using the free Nikon Wireless Mobile Utility app. For example, after enabling Wi-Fi on the D7200, I simply connected my iPhone (using the Settings app) to the camera’s ad-hoc Wi-Fi network and then launched Nikon’s app. The process takes only a minute or so, although we recommend that iOS users take a few extra moments to set up a network password on the camera to safeguard access to the images. For Android users, the WPS protocol provides secure access by default.



Built-in Wi-Fi can be a handy feature. Moments after shooting this portrait, I was able to transfer the image to my phone and send my subject a copy via email.

However, the app’s remote-shooting options are extremely limited. All you can do from within the app is set an AF point, turn on the self-timer, or fire the shutter. In this regard, the Nikon app falls well behind that of our runner-up pick, the [Canon EOS 80D](http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/image-comparison?attr18=lowlight&attr13_0=canon_eos80d&attr13_1=nikon_d7200&attr13_2=pentax_k3ii&attr13_3=canon_eos5dmkii&attr15_0=jpeg&attr15_1=jpeg&attr15_2=jpeg&attr15_3=jpeg&attr16_0=6400&attr16_1=6400&attr16_2=6400&attr16_3=6400&attr126_2=normal&normalization=full&widget=1&x=0.2952017885806007&y=-0.7083395745955662), which lets you adjust ISO, shutter speed, aperture, and exposure compensation from your mobile device.



The D7200’s default color, contrast, and white-balance settings consistently provide good results. I shot this image using the camera’s standard picture style with no additional edits.

Who else likes our pick

Considering that the Nikon D7200 has so much in common with its highly acclaimed predecessor, it’s no surprise that this camera has received praise from the top camera review sites. The performance of its 24-megapixel sensor [prompted DxOMark to give it the highest image-quality score](http://www.dxomark.com/Reviews/Nikon-D7200-The-new-APS-C-champ/Nikon-D7200-Measurement-Outstanding-Dynamic-Range) of any APS-C model. Impressed with the camera’s “outstanding” dynamic range, reviewer Paul Carroll writes, “The class-leading APS-C sensor scores from the Nikon D7200 mean that results from the smaller [APS-C] format are getting ever closer to the best full-frame sensors.”

The [experts at DPReview write](http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/nikon-d7200) that they found the D7200’s upgrades over its predecessor to be significant. “The most obvious improvement in the D7200 compared to the D7100,” they say, “will be noticed by anyone who shoots continuously. The buffer size on the D7100 was tiny and filled up almost instantly.… You can now fire away with the D7200 for up to 18 14-bit … Raws, or 100+ JPEGs.” Calling the updated AF system “a boon for photographers, particularly low-light ones,” the reviewers say that “you can focus in conditions a full stop dimmer” than with the D7100. “The camera will focus a whole lot better in low light conditions, across the entire frame,” they write. “In other words, its non-central AF points will likely focus in dimmer conditions than any other DSLR out there.”

[Mike Tomkins at Imaging Resource notes](http://www.imaging-resource.com/PRODS/nikon-d7200/nikon-d7200-image-quality.htm#print-quality) a real-world benefit for photographers who like to display their works on the wall, saying that at ISO 100 to 200 the D7200 delivers “excellent prints at 30 x 40 inches and higher … with rich, vibrant colors and nice overall tonal depth.”

[Joshua Waller of ePhotozine sums up](http://www.ephotozine.com/article/nikon-d7200-review-27218) the D7200 as an “update to an already impressive Digital SLR, with improvements in a number of important areas, including ISO performance … improved video performance … [and] improved focus performance.”

[Amateur Photographer’s Callum McInerney-Riley mentions](http://www.amateurphotographer.co.uk/reviews/dslrs/nikon-d7200-review) video-centric upgrades such as a “flat” Picture Control setting that “provides a basis for videographers to record footage with very little in-camera processing applied, making it easier to colour grade and sharpen the footage in post-production.”

[Ben Pitt of Expert Reviews writes](http://www.expertreviews.co.uk/digital-cameras/dslrs/1403268/nikon-d7200-review), “The Nikon D7200 is the latest incarnation of a line of cameras that we’ve always greatly admired. With big viewfinders, sophisticated autofocus and metering systems, lots of physical controls and superbly thought out ergonomics, they’re ideal for keen photographers who want professional-level features but can’t justify the cost of a full-frame digital SLR.”

[On TechRadar, Amy Davies highlights](http://www.techradar.com/us/reviews/cameras-and-camcorders/cameras/digital-slrs-hybrids/nikon-d7200-1290203/review/2) the camera’s top-notch build quality, writing, “Nikon has worked hard to make the D7200 look and feel like a high-quality piece of kit, and it shows – the camera feels and handles like a more expensive model, such as the D610 or the D750.”

Flaws but not dealbreakers

As good as the D7200 is, it does have a few shortcomings. Maxing out at 6 frames per second, it has the slowest burst rate of any of the cameras we considered, and it falls well behind the [Sony a77 II](https://wclink.co/link/4642/0/1/25279/), which shoots at twice that rate.

A common complaint from reviewers focuses on the fixed rear screen. “It is a shame not to see an articulating or touch sensitive screen (or both!) though here, as that would make some aspects of shooting even easier,” [writes Amy Davies for Photography Blog](http://www.photographyblog.com/reviews/nikon_d7200_review/). Touchscreens are becoming rather common on entry-level DSLRs and can make setting focus in live view or video mode as simple as tapping the screen. And having an articulated screen like that on the runner-up [Canon EOS 80D](http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/image-comparison?attr18=lowlight&attr13_0=canon_eos80d&attr13_1=nikon_d7200&attr13_2=pentax_k3ii&attr13_3=canon_eos5dmkii&attr15_0=jpeg&attr15_1=jpeg&attr15_2=jpeg&attr15_3=jpeg&attr16_0=6400&attr16_1=6400&attr16_2=6400&attr16_3=6400&attr126_2=normal&normalization=full&widget=1&x=0.2952017885806007&y=-0.7083395745955662) and the Sony a77 II can make shooting with the camera at waist height or overhead much more practical.

Though the D7200 offers built-in Wi-Fi, several reviewers have found the accompanying mobile app underwhelming, with no way to control even basic exposure settings. “The ‘Nikon Wireless Mobile Utility’ is very basic,” [writes Joshua Waller for ePhotozine](http://www.ephotozine.com/article/nikon-d7200-review-27218). “The app lets you remotely shoot, or view photos, and then transfer images. You can set the self-timer, but there are very few other options, and it’s disappointing that the app is so basic considering how advanced the Nikon D7200 is.”

The D7200 is a less capable camera for video than it is for stills. It’s certainly fine for casual video recording, but it falls well behind more-video-capable DSLRs such as the Canon EOS 80D and Sony a77 II. For starters, shooting Full HD video at 60 fps requires switching to a 1.3x crop mode, and as [DPReview notes](http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/nikon-d7200/10), “the 1.3X crop appears to come from a lower resolution capture upscaled to 1920 x 1080,” so the video quality suffers a bit. This additional crop can also make getting wide-angle shots difficult, as the field of view is significantly reduced.

Video autofocus is also much slower and less precise than with both the Canon and Sony cameras. Evaluating this model’s autofocus in live view and video modes, [DPReview says](http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/nikon-d7200/10) that it fails to match “the impressive in-video autofocus of Canon’s EOS 70D or 7D Mark II,” calling the “fast, jumpy focus” distracting. (We’ll show you a comparison between the D7200 and our runner-up pick below.)

In live view, precise manual focus is often a guessing game, since the D7200 lacks the focus peaking (a visual aid that highlights an in-focus area of the scene) found on Sony’s a77 II. And you can’t adjust aperture settings once you’ve started recording. If you shoot video only occasionally, and primarily for things like birthday parties or family get-togethers, these drawbacks are hardly dealbreakers. But if you’re looking for an entry point for more-serious cinematic pursuits, we suggest looking at our runner-up and also-great picks.

Finally, the D7200 offers you no aperture control while recording video—you’re stuck with whatever aperture you set at the moment you pressed the record button, which can be an issue if you’re shooting outdoors and the light changes during filming.

Runner-up



The Canon EOS 80D is the best camera for video shooters.

Also great

[](https://wclink.co/link/6488/91778/1/25297)

[$1,500\* from B&H](https://wclink.co/link/6488/91778/1/25297)

[$1,500 from Amazon](https://wclink.co/link/6488/18920/1/25297)

\*At the time of publishing, the price was $1,600.

[For video shooters and Canon users](https://wclink.co/link/6488/91778/1/25297)

[Canon EOS 80D](https://wclink.co/link/6488/91778/1/25297)

This Canon DSLR can’t quite match the image quality of our top pick, but it offers an articulated rear screen and faster, more-precise autofocus in live view mode, making it great for video shooters.

If you plan to shoot video on a regular basis, or if you already have several Canon lenses you don’t want to replace, we recommend the [Canon EOS 80D](https://wclink.co/link/6488/0/1/25291/), which is a significant improvement over its predecessor (the [EOS 70D](https://wclink.co/link/588/0/1/25293/), our previous runner-up). The image quality of this 24-megapixel DSLR isn’t quite as stellar as that of our top pick. You get a bit more [color noise](http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/image-comparison?attr18=lowlight&attr13_0=canon_eos80d&attr13_1=nikon_d7200&attr13_2=pentax_k3ii&attr13_3=canon_eos5dmkii&attr15_0=raw&attr15_1=raw&attr15_2=raw&attr15_3=raw&attr16_0=12800&attr16_1=12800&attr16_2=12800&attr16_3=12800&attr126_2=normal&normalization=full&widget=1&x=-0.7996159137812429&y=0.8636881580073612) in low-light shots, as well, and [DxOMark’s lab tests](http://www.dxomark.com/Cameras/Compare/Side-by-side/Canon-EOS-80D-versus-Nikon-D7200___1076_1020) found the 80D to have a narrower dynamic range than the Nikon D7200, so it won’t display as wide a range of light-to-dark in a single image. Battery life, while rated at a respectable 960 shots per charge, is still short of the impressive 1,100-shot rating of the D7200. And the 80D, like its predecessor, offers just a single SD card slot, while the Nikon has two.



While the 80D doesn’t have quite as much dynamic range as our top pick, shooting in raw mode, slightly underexposing the image, and then using editing software to open up shadow areas, as I’ve done here, can help you keep enough detail in a bright background and darker foreground for a pleasing image.

In several areas, however, the 80D offers some very real advantages over our top pick. Its rear screen can tilt and rotate, making the camera easier to shoot with when you have to hold it at waist level or above your head. The screen is also touch sensitive, which makes for much easier menu navigation and much faster focus-point selection. The 80D’s large image buffer means you can shoot more raw images in a single burst (24 versus 18 on the D7200).

What really sets the 80D apart from most of the competition is its array of benefits for video shooters. Powered by Canon’s Dual Pixel AF system, the 80D offers fast, precise autofocus in live view mode (where you compose using the rear screen instead of looking through the viewfinder), a traditional area of weakness for DSLRs. When this feature debuted in the 70D (you can see it in action in the video below), [Imaging Resource called it](http://www.imaging-resource.com/PRODS/canon-70d/canon-70d-conclusion.htm) “a rare, groundbreaking innovation,” noting that “this technology finally puts true camcorder-like performance into an HD-DSLR.” A bit later, the review says that “when using live view for still shooting, the advanced autofocusing felt nearly as fast as traditional viewfinder shooting under most scenarios.” On top of that, whereas live view autofocus on the 70D could track moving subjects only while in video mode, the 80D brings this continuous-focus capability to still images as well—with good results, [as DPReview reports](http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/canon-eos-80d-review/7).

Although this clip was shot with the previous-generation Canon EOS 70D, the comparison is still valid, as the 80D uses the same autofocus technology in video mode.

With Canon’s Dual Pixel AF technology (here’s a good [technical explanation](http://www.amateurphotographer.co.uk/reviews/dslrs/canon-eos-70d-review/2) if you’re curious), autofocus in video mode is smooth and accurate, as you can see in the video clip above. Just as important is the fact that you can set focus quickly merely by tapping on the screen.

The Nikon D7200 uses much slower contrast-detection AF, which results in the focus wobble you see in the clip above. And because you have to move the AF point step by step by holding down the rear thumb pad, switching focus between objects located at opposite ends of the frame takes a lot longer.

Unlike our top pick, the 80D offers full manual exposure control while you’re recording video, letting you change both aperture and shutter speed during filming. In manual mode you can use the Auto ISO function, as well. The 80D offers a choice of video-compression modes when shooting Full HD footage, letting you prioritize either video quality or file size. You can also enable SMPTE time code, a pro-level feature crucial for synchronizing footage if you’re shooting the same scene with multiple cameras.

Another boon is that the [EF-S 18-135mm f/3.5-5.6 IS USM](https://wclink.co/link/6946/0/1/25294/) kit lens bundled with the 80D incorporates a stepper motor for quiet focus, so the built-in mic doesn’t pick up lens operation during filming. The D7200’s kit lens, by comparison, produces audible noise while focusing.

If you plan to shoot a lot of video, the Canon EOS 80D will be a more capable option than any other midrange DSLR. But if your primary interest is still photography, and you compose primarily through the viewfinder as opposed to the rear screen, we think you’re much better off with the Nikon D7200, which currently sells at a much bigger discount from its launch price than the more recently released Canon.

Also great (for sports and action)



With faster shooting and camera-based stabilization, the Sony a77 II makes sense for sports and action photographers.

Also great

[](https://wclink.co/link/4642/91779/1/25298)

[$1,600\* from B&H](https://wclink.co/link/4642/91779/1/25298)

[$1,600 from Amazon](https://wclink.co/link/4642/44081/1/25298)

\*At the time of publishing, the price was $1,800.

[For sports and action](https://wclink.co/link/4642/91779/1/25298)

[Sony a77 II](https://wclink.co/link/4642/91779/1/25298)

Its battery life is poor, and you might balk at using an electronic viewfinder, but the a77 II lets you shoot at a blazing 12 fps and customize a wide range of video-shooting options.

If you shoot mostly sports and action subjects, don’t mind using an electronic viewfinder, and are willing to pack some spare batteries, we like the 24-megapixel [Sony a77 II](https://wclink.co/link/4642/0/1/25279/). It’s the fastest APS-C DSLR around, capable of shooting stills at 12 frames per second, twice the speed of the Nikon D7200. It isn’t quite up to the class-leading image quality of our top pick—Sony’s default JPEG rendering can [smear fine image detail](http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/sony-alpha-slt-a77ii/13)—but the a77 II does have in-body image stabilization to minimize camera shake no matter which lens you’re using. To get image stabilization from our top pick and runner-up, you have to splurge for a lens with that feature.

With a battery that lasts for only 480 shots per charge, you should plan on buying a spare or two if you want to make it through a busy day of shooting. One reason for the poor battery life is that the battery must power the EVF as well as the rear screen. Using an EVF is likely heresy to some DSLR shooters, who feel that it’s like looking at the world through a TV screen. Indeed, the experience can be unsettling in particularly low light, where the EVF must “gain up” to show detail, producing a grainy, noise-filled view of the scene.

But you should know that the OLED EVF in the a77 II is a very good one, with a 2.4-million-pixel resolution providing a crisp, clear view in all but very-low-light scenes. As [John Shafer writes for Imaging Resource](http://www.imaging-resource.com/PRODS/sony-a77-ii/sony-a77-ii-shooters-report-part-i.htm), “The A77 II EVF is one of the best I’ve used, too. Chances are, if you picked up the A77 II and put it to your eye, it would take you a few minutes to even realize you weren’t actually looking through a traditional optical viewfinder. It’s that good.” And an EVF has the advantage of previewing both the color and exposure of the final image before you shoot, so you know exactly what you’ll get.

[DPReview has good things to say](http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/sony-alpha-slt-a77ii/12) about the a77 II’s movie capabilities, calling it “a very robust video camera” that “holds its own in both bright and low light video shooting scenarios.” The reviewers found live view autofocus to be smooth and precise in [locking on to subjects](https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=31&v=CNlEsLYpcW8) at varying distances, writing that image stabilization “does a good job smoothing out sudden movements” while shooting video, though they note that activating image stabilization crops the field of view significantly.

The a77 II has a two-hinged articulated screen that you can manipulate into a range of positions, which is handy when you’re forced to shoot from an awkward angle. It’s also weather-sealed and equipped with Wi-Fi and NFC connectivity, and at 647 grams it’s one of the lightest cameras in our roundup.

The competition

As discussed earlier, midrange DSLRs occupy a small niche for serious photographers. Fitted with APS-C sensors, these cameras are lighter and slightly more compact than more expensive full-frame DSLRs. But midrange models offer much sturdier build quality, more sophisticated autofocus, and significantly better battery life than entry-level DSLRs.

The [Nikon D7100](https://wclink.co/link/3887/0/1/25277/) was our previous top midrange pick and is still for sale. (Unlike with compact cameras, it’s not uncommon for camera makers to keep the previous generation of DSLR models available.) The D7100 remains a notably capable camera, sharing enough of the features of our top pick that we don’t recommend upgrading from the D7100 to the D7200. But the improvements that Nikon has made in the D7200 (including an improved sensor, better low-light autofocus, and longer battery life) mean that the new model will be able to hold its own against future DSLRs longer than the D7100 will. In other words, if you’re buying a new camera right now, go with the D7200 over the D7100.

Canon has a number of midrange models currently available. However, two of these, the [EOS 7D](https://wclink.co/link/4652/0/1/25288/) and [EOS 60D](https://wclink.co/link/587/0/1/25289/), have been around for more than five years—fairly long even by DSLR standards. The older sensors and processors in these cameras just can’t compete with today’s technology, especially when it comes to image quality at high ISO settings.

The [Canon EOS 70D](https://wclink.co/link/588/0/1/25293/) was the runner-up in a previous version of this guide, but the much more capable [EOS 80D](https://wclink.co/link/6488/0/1/25291/) has supplanted it. The 70D has a lower-resolution sensor, doesn’t focus as well in low light, offers a smaller selection of focus points, gives you fewer images per burst, and can record video at only 30 (versus 60) frames per second. It also lacks a headphone jack for audio monitoring while shooting video. As of this writing, it costs about $300 less than the newer 80D, but we think the additional features and performance of the 80D are well worth the extra cash.

The [Canon EOS 7D II](https://wclink.co/link/4648/0/1/25284/) represents a huge step up from its predecessor, with a new-generation sensor, faster autofocus, a higher-resolution rear screen, dual card slots, and greater video options. Outside of more-precise live view autofocus and better video compression, however, the 7D II’s specs simply meet, rather than exceed, those of our top pick. With a price tag close to $2,000 currently, it’s far more expensive than our top pick, but it lacks Wi-Fi, and its image quality is no better than that of the also less expensive runner-up, the [EOS 80D](https://wclink.co/link/6488/0/1/25291/). The 7D II is a heavy camera, as well, weighing more than some full-frame DSLRs, including the [Canon EOS 6D](https://wclink.co/link/4649/0/1/25285/) and [Nikon D610](https://wclink.co/link/4650/0/1/25286/).

Canon’s latest entry-level DSLR has edged closer to midrange territory. The [EOS Rebel T6s](https://wclink.co/link/3854/0/1/25292/) stands apart from its co-released sibling, the [EOS Rebel T6i](https://wclink.co/link/4643/0/1/25280/), by offering a top-plate LCD for quickly confirming camera settings, a rear control dial to make changing those settings easier, and faster live view autofocus than you usually see in a beginner DSLR. In many other respects, though, the T6s falls well short of the contenders here. It has a small viewfinder that provides only 95 percent coverage (which means objects will appear along the edges of the final photo that you didn’t see in the viewfinder), a slow burst rate of 5 fps, and dreadful battery life that will barely get you through a half day of shooting. And with no weather-sealing and more plastic components than our other contenders, the T6s isn’t well-suited for outdoor adventures.

The [Pentax K-3](https://wclink.co/link/4641/0/1/25295/) was our budget pick in a previous version of this guide. At this writing, however, it is no longer listed on the company’s US website, and the kit-lens bundle is in scarce supply. Camera retail giant B&H Photo shows it as discontinued, and only third parties have it for sale on Amazon, all citing low stock.

The [Pentax K-3 II](https://wclink.co/link/4651/0/1/25287/) is a conservative upgrade to the K3 that offers the same sensor, AF system, and burst rates. The only thing genuinely new about the K-3 II is a pixel-shift mode that actually shifts the sensor during a four-shot image sequence to provide greater image detail and to reduce noise at high ISO settings. Test results [look promising](https://www.dpreview.com/reviews/pentax-k-1/9), but the need to use a tripod to get those benefits obviously limits the mode’s usefulness. We just don’t see this feature as compelling enough on its own to recommend the K-3 II over the Nikon D7200, which surpasses it in image quality and battery life, or the Canon EOS 80D and Sony a77 II, which have far more video capabilities.

The [Pentax K-70](https://wclink.co/link/14495/0/1/25273/) is an entry-level DSLR with enticing midrange features such as weather-sealing and the omission of a low-pass filter on the sensor for more-detailed images. The K-70 is also the first Pentax DSLR to feature hybrid autofocus for faster focusing when you’re shooting video or still images using live view. The K-70, however, has paltry battery life, even by entry-level standards, with a CIPA rating of just 410 shots per charge. It has fewer AF points and a lower-resolution rear screen than any of our midrange contenders, too. It also offers just a single SD card slot, unlike our top pick and the Pentax K-3 models, which have dual slots. These drawbacks make the K-70 an easy dismissal.

[Nikon’s D500](https://wclink.co/link/6106/0/1/25290/) is the company’s new flagship APS-C DSLR. An impressive 153-point AF system (borrowed from the pro workhorse D5), an ISO 51,200 maximum, 4K video capability, and one of the highest-resolution touchscreens we’ve ever seen on a DSLR all point to a top-performing camera that will handle anything you throw at it. The price for all of that, unfortunately, is more than $3,000 for a kit-lens bundle, far beyond what we recommend most people spend on a midrange DSLR.

What to look forward to

Ricoh announced the [Pentax KP](https://wclink.co/link/17697/0/1/30730/), a weather-sealed APS-C DSLR with a tilting touchscreen and a class-leading top sensitivity of ISO 819,200 (our top pick maxes out at ISO 25,600 in color mode). Matching the resolution of our current picks, the 24MP Pentax KP also features a built-in five-axis image stabilization system that Ricoh claims can deliver five stops of hand holding beyond what you’d get with a non-stabilized camera or lens. A novel feature of the Pentax KP is its replaceable handgrip. With an Allen wrench you can remove the standard grip and swap it out for a medium or large grip, both of which come in the box. The most obvious downsides are short battery life of about 400 shots per charge, nearly one third less capacity than our top pick, as well as having only a single memory card slot. The Pentax KP goes on sale in late February with a list price of $1,100 in a body-only configuration. Once review units become available we’ll bring a unit in for testing.